

APPLICATION OF

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IMAGING PLATE CASSETTE FOR EXTENDED X-RAY PHOTOGRAPHS

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CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims priority from U. S. Provisional Appl. Ser. No. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/226,709, filed August 18, 2000 under 35 U.S.C. §111(b).

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The invention generally pertains to an X-ray film cassette apparatus. More particularly, the invention relates to an modified x-ray film cassette holder that provides for the use of extended length film and/or overlapping imaging plates such that complete x-ray images can be provided for the spine or long bones of the body.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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X-rays photographs are generated through the exposure of x-ray sensitive film or imaging elements to the penetrating electromagnetic radiation of accelerated electrons suddenly stopped in their trajectory by collision with a solid body. In this fashion x-rays typically pass through soft tissue of the body but will be stopped by denser structures such as bone and some tumors. These features then allow x-ray radiography techniques to aid in the diagnosis and treatment of injuries or other ailments.

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Computed Radiography

In computed radiography, a photographic element has an image formed upon its surface by x-rays, and the element is subsequently provided to a reader where the photographic element is stimulated to emit a radiation pattern that is captured for storage

and use. Computer Radiography (CR) utilizes a phosphor screen with energy storage capability as an X-ray image receptor. The screen is contained in standard size radiographic cassettes and in integrated imaging stands or tables. The cassettes can be used in existing radiographic tables and stands.

5 Cassettes of the kind used in computed radiography may comprise a container having upper and lower parts that are hinged together so that they can be opened for insertion of a thin, flexible film sheet ^{IMAGING PLATE} or rigid film plate comprising the photographic element. The cassette is closed and latched so that the cassette with the element therein can be used with an x-ray apparatus to produce an image on the photographic element.

10 Then the cassette is taken to a reader where the cassette must be opened and the photographic element extracted by suitable feeders, such as suction feeding devices. The photographic element separate from the cassette is transported through the reader where it is stimulated to emit a radiation pattern and subsequently erased before being returned to the cassette for re-use.

15 This technology ^{CAN OFFER} offers diagnostic quality advantages over conventional film/screen methods and decreases in the time required for processing. Advantages of computed radiography include energy subtraction, which makes it possible to view bone-only and soft tissue-only images of the chest, dynamic range control and gradation processing, which makes it possible to see both bone and soft tissue on the same image.

20 ^{INS 1} ~~With dynamic range control~~, the cassettes are transferred to a reader system, or in the case of integrated devices, the reading section of the device. Here the imaging plate is scanned with a finely-focused laser beam which stimulates luminescence proportional to the local X-ray exposure. The luminescence signal is converted to an electrical signal and is thereby digitized. The data representing the image is subjected to digital signal

25 processing to optimize the diagnostic content of the visualized data. The image can be recorded on laser printed film transmitted or stored digitally.

Gradation processing is done via computer to optimize image contrast and optical density. Image contrast can be adjusted as desired, in accordance with the anatomical region and diagnostic purpose.

Energy subtraction expands diagnostic capabilities by providing a user with three views instead of just one: the standard radiograph, a bone subtracted radiograph and a soft tissue subtracted radiograph.

Cassette Construction

5 Typically an X-ray film cartridge is composed of a rectangular cartridge body and a rectangular cover hinged to the body. The cover is locked by means of a pair of latches mounted to one side of the cover opposite to the side hinged to the body. Often, a cushion pad is interposed between the cover and at least one intensifying sheet attached to the cover so as to press the intensifying sheet against the X-ray film. The cover is of
10 rectangular shape and has hinges on one side edge thereof and latch means on the opposite ends thereof. The hinge is usually composed of a pair of hinges to pivotally mount the cover at one side thereof to the body, and the latch typically is composed of a pair of latches slidably mounted to the cover to be engaged with a pair of slots provided in one side wall of the cartridge body. Therefore, the hinged cover is held to the
15 cartridge body at four points.

The above described conventional X-ray film and film cassette, whether viewed as a typical x-ray photograph or digitized through computer radiography techniques, has
a defect in that the film or visualizing element fitting within the cassette is generally not
long enough to provide a full view of the spine (e.g. for scoliosis patients) or the other
20 long bones of the body. To remedy this situation the prior art has relied multiple and sequential x-ray exposures or other more expensive procedures, such as CT scans or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). The sequential x-ray photographs of the prior art invariably left a small portion of the structure to be imaged off the x-ray photographs, leading to a gap in the diagnostic ability of x-ray procedures. Meanwhile, though the
25 more expensive MRI imaging can be used to evaluate the spinal cord and spinal nerves this capability is often missing from existing clinical institutions or is not available on a routine basis. As with all studies, MRI is done for a specific indication and correlated

with clinical examination. Myelography, a radiographic study which uses an injected dye to provide contrast to study the spinal canal and its contents, may also be used for situations in which conditions such as scoliosis are suspected but is fairly labor intensive and exposes potential patients to radioactivity for a longer period than typical x-ray
5 procedures. CT scans are used to provide improved definition of abnormalities of vertebral size, shape or number and are also not always available on a routine basis.

Accordingly, a need exists to provide a x-ray photograph and corresponding x-ray film cassette that will provide for routine and improved x-ray photographs of the spine or other long bones of the body.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The primary object of the present invention is to provide an apparatus and method for recording a x-ray image on either a stimuable phosphor screen or imaging plate and on a conventional X-ray film with a substantially equal intensity of X-rays. The image so recorded is one that provides an overlapping image so that no diagnostic
15 information is lost in a modified cassette holder.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a method of recording a x-ray image of excellent sharpness and resolution both on a stimuable phosphor screen or imaging plate and on a conventional X-ray film.

A specific object of the present invention is also to provide a cassette for use in
20 conjunction with the method mentioned above.

Another object of the present invention is to provide an extended X-ray film imaging plate that is able to obtain a sharp image of an extended body section with a simple structure.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1A Shows a side-view of a imaging plate cassette of the invention in which two standard size cassettes are modified to provide for an extended x-ray image of a target.

5 FIG. 1B Shows a edge-view of a imaging plate cassette of the invention in which two standard size cassettes are modified to provide for an extended x-ray image of a target.

FIG. 2 Shows two imaging plates of the invention inserted into a modified x-ray cassette in an overlapping confirmation.

10 FIG. 3A Shows a tube side view of two imaging plates inserted into a modified cassette of the invention.

FIG. 3B Shows a magnified cassette edge view of two imaging plates inserted into a modified cassette holder of the invention demonstrating the overlap of the imaging plates.

FIG. 4 Shows the "Z" fold of material that is preferably part of the invention.

15 FIG. 5 Shows a magnified view of the "Z" fold of material that is preferably part of the invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

20 In FIGS. 1 to 5, an X-ray cassette 10 in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention is mainly for recording an X-ray image of the chest of a human body (not shown) on an X-ray film.

The cassettes are joined at the bottom and would not be hinged on the back creating one long cassette with two latch ends. The CF front may be replaced with Aluminum strips to strengthen cassette 10.

Preferably, the invention provides for an x-ray cassette that will hold 14" x 17" imaging plates. These imaging plates (e.g. film) must overlap inside the cassette in order to prevent loss of image and diagnostic information. In the prior art, there is a narrow space on typical x-ray film where no diagnostic information is recorded due to the space existing between even two sequentially used imaging plates (IP). To resolve this failure the current invention may provide for a modified cassette structure designed to accommodate securely two overlapping image plates. The top and bottom of the "Z" fold should be folded under the fabric inside the cassette so the IP's do not strike the edge of the "Z" film when being placed in the cassette. For the overlapping IP's a "Z" folded sheet of fabric or other suitable material can be used as a separator at the junction of the two cassettes. Preferably, the "Z" folded sheet is made of a polyester material. In addition the "Z" folded sheet may also be lined on both sides with phosphor imaging materials.

As previously mentioned, the "Z" film must overlap. Preferably, this overlap is less than 0.5 of an inch. Preferably, the "Z" fold is fabricated out of polyester material.

To accommodate this change the size of standard cassettes may be altered to provide for sufficient overlap of imaging plates. When employed in this fashion sequential x-ray photographs retain the full-length image of a desired object, such as an individuals spine, without loss of any diagnostic information. Typically the cassette will need to be shortened by up to 1.0 inch to provide sufficient overlap, preferably the modified cassette holder will be shortened by 0.5 inch.

The method in accordance with the present invention comprises maintaining an X-ray film and a stimuable phosphor sheet in close contact with each other and shielded from light, and exposing said X-ray film and said stimuable phosphor sheet to X-rays through an object, whereby a x-ray image of said object is recorded on said stimuable phosphor sheet and, at the same time, said X-ray film is exposed to light instantaneously emitted from said stimuable phosphor sheet upon exposure to X-rays to record a photographic latent image of the same x-ray image on said X-ray film.

Thus, it can be appreciated that an x-ray cassette system and film therefore have been presented which will facilitate an improvement in the diagnostic use of x-ray photographs, particularly for the spine and the other long bones of an individual animal.

Accordingly, it is to be understood that the embodiments of the invention herein
5 providing for an improved diagnostic and informational use of x-ray photographs are merely illustrative of the application of the principles of the invention. It will be evident from the foregoing description that changes in the form, methods of use, and applications of the elements of the disclosed x-ray cassette system and associated elements disclosed may be resorted to without departing from the spirit of the invention, or the scope of the
10 appended claims.